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F O R T U N E S W A S H E D A W A Y

"TENNESSEE TERRACING"

Broadcast No. 35 in a series
of discussions of soil con-
servation in the Ohio Valley.

WLW, Cincinnati

December 24, 1938 6:00-6:15 p.m.

U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
SOIL CONSERVATION SERVICE
Dayton, Ohio



SOUND: Thunder, followed by rain...

ANNOUNCER

Fortunes Washed Away!

ORGAN: I GET THE BLUES WHEN IT RAINS.

ANNOUNCER

The Obion River rises in the uplands of Western Tennessee. Toward the Forked Deer and the Mississippi it flows, fed by the waters of Clover Creek, Cane Creek, Mud Creek, Reeds Creek, many smaller streams. The Obion River drainage, productive though it is, is threatened by the same enemy which invades all rolling landscapes--soil erosion, for its soils, Memphis and Grenada silt loams, melt like sugar in the rains. Today, some farms in Western Tennessee lie abandoned, desolate, barn doors creaking in a mournful wind, but not the farm of E. S. Cultra, near Rives. In 1923...

ARCHIE

Some farm you picked out, Dad.

ROBERT

That's the truth.

CULTRA

Well, now, don't you think you're looking at the bad side of it?

ROBERT

Bad side of it? What other side is there?

ARCHIE

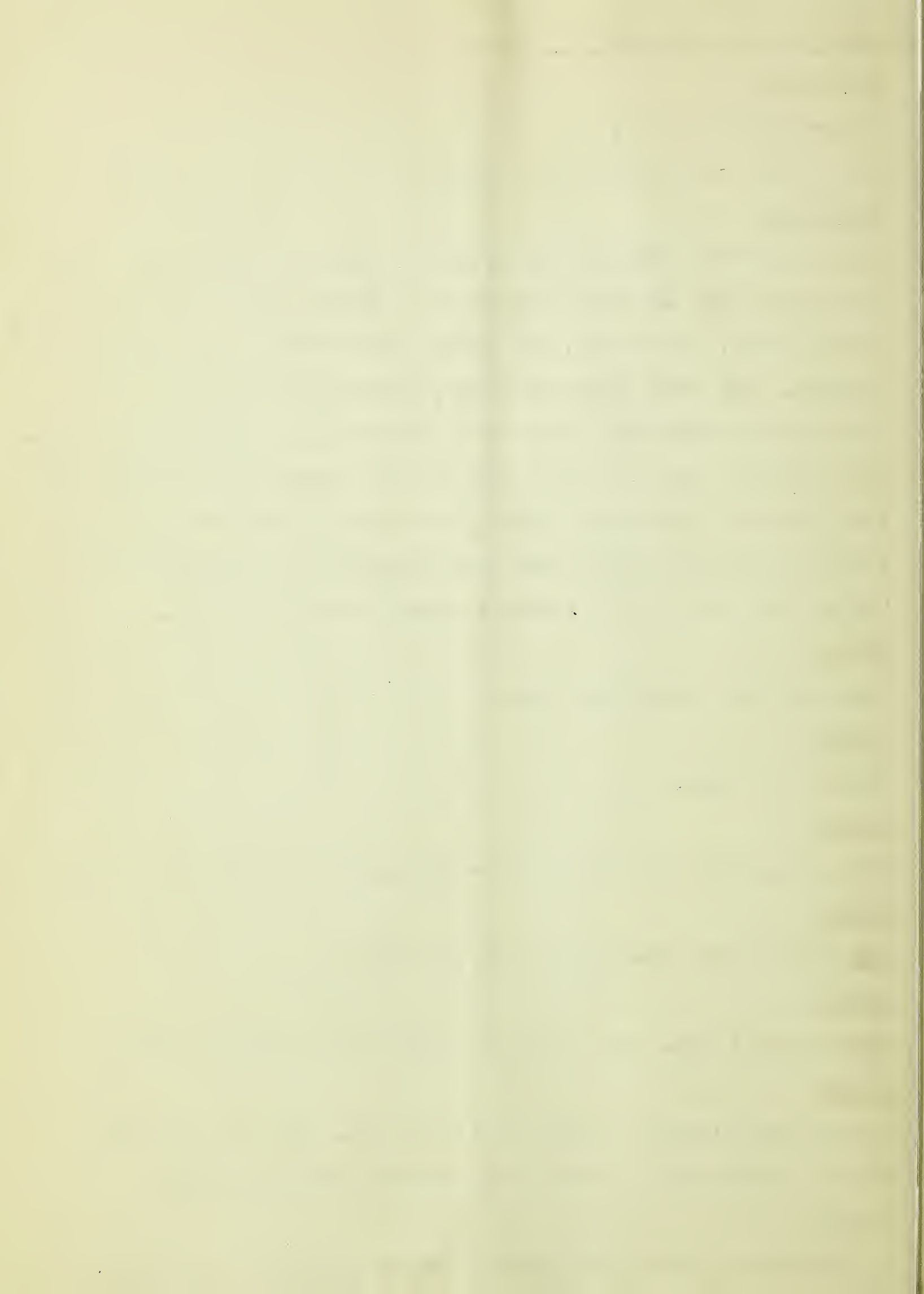
That's what I say. How come you bought this place, anyhow?

CULTRA

The railroad company helped me pick it out. You see, for our nursery, we've got to have a farm here by the railroad...

ARCHIE

If you ask me, you're not going to raise anything but gullies.



ROBERT

And plenty of 'em.

CULTRA

Now, now....you boys are still in high school. You let me be the judge of this farm. It'll be handy for shipping our products.

ARCHIE

Yeah, but look at it. Nothing but broom grass and rabbits.

CULTRA

Well, Archie, the man that had this place before did let it go to the bad. But, look...

ARCHIE

Yeah, look! Why, there's gullies so deep you can hide a mule in them.

CULTRA

Maybe, on some of the fields. That one over there, you could probably hide a barn in those gullies. But we've got 230 acres here, and of course, the bottom land is plenty rich. We oughta be able to do something about those gullies...

ROBERT

Such as what?

CULTRA

Well, there's terracing. I heard that some professor is going to hold a terracing demonstration on John Seymour's place near Union City...Bliss, I think his name is.

ARCHIE (contemptuously)

Terracing!

ROBERT

Why, they've been terracing back home in North Carolina for years, and there's still a lot of soil washing.



CULTRA

Maybe so. Maybe a lot of those terraces were too little. Maybe they didn't keep them up. Maybe they didn't have outlets...

ARCHIE

And maybe terracing is the bunk.

CULTRA

And maybe...I just say, maybe...a couple of high school boys can be stubborn. Anyhow, I'm going to that terracing demonstration over on John Seymour's place.

ORGAN: DOWN ON THE FARM.

SOUND: Tractor motor idling.

CULTRA (fading in)

....so I'm right glad I ran into you, Thompson. Mighta known you'd be at this demonstration, though.

THOMPSON

Always trying to learn a little more about terraces, Ed. You say you don't know much about 'em?

CULTRA

Well, practically nothing.

THOMPSON

This Professor Bliss has been working with them, and he'll show us terraces what are terraces. While he's getting the crowd together, let me tell you a little about terracing.

CULTRA

I wish you would.

THOMPSON

When the settlers in the South cleared their slopes they found that the soil washed mighty bad. Almost as fast as the land was broken, gullies began to form.



CULTRA

That's what happened to this place I bought.

THOMPSON

Well, a lot of these old-time farmers tried to do something about it, but lots of their soil-saving methods were crude. Sometimes they did more damage than they did good. They dug hillside ditches, and planted narrow strips of vegetation on the contour.

CULTRA

I think I know what happened in some cases. Benches were formed on the hillsides, and gullies cut across them...

THOMPSON

...and in a good many cases whole fields and whole farms had to be abandoned. But they kept at it. A farmer named Priestley Mangum--he's one of your North Carolinians--built what was probably the first broad-base terrace, and then a fellow named Nichols developed another kind.

CULTRA

I hope I don't have to do much experimenting, because I need the land, and I've got to have something coming in, you know.

THOMPSON

Now, Ed, I've been in the engineering business long enough to know that a terrace, properly constructed, mind you, I said properly constructed, can keep your soil from washing.

CULTRA

I'm beginning to be convinced of it. Anyhow, George, I'm interested in seeing this demonstration. My soil is so fine it will almost float in water. I've got to do something.



THOMPSON

You know, I wish I'd brought that bulletin on terracing I got from the Department of Agriculture. I'd like for you to see it.

CULTRA

Is that where you got the idea of terracing?

THOMPSON

No, I just picked it up from the neighbors. But at first, I built my terraces so small that...wait, Professor Bliss is getting ready to start.

CULTRA

Yeah, looks like he's all set.

SOUND: General conversation of crowd. Roar of tractor going further away.

CULTRA

.....hmmmm.....

THOMPSON

See? That plow throws up a ridge, along the contour, you might say.

CULTRA

By golly, I'm going to try that. I've gotta do something...or move. But I can't afford a tractor just now.

THOMPSON

Listen, Ed. All you need is a two-horse plow and a team.

CULTRA

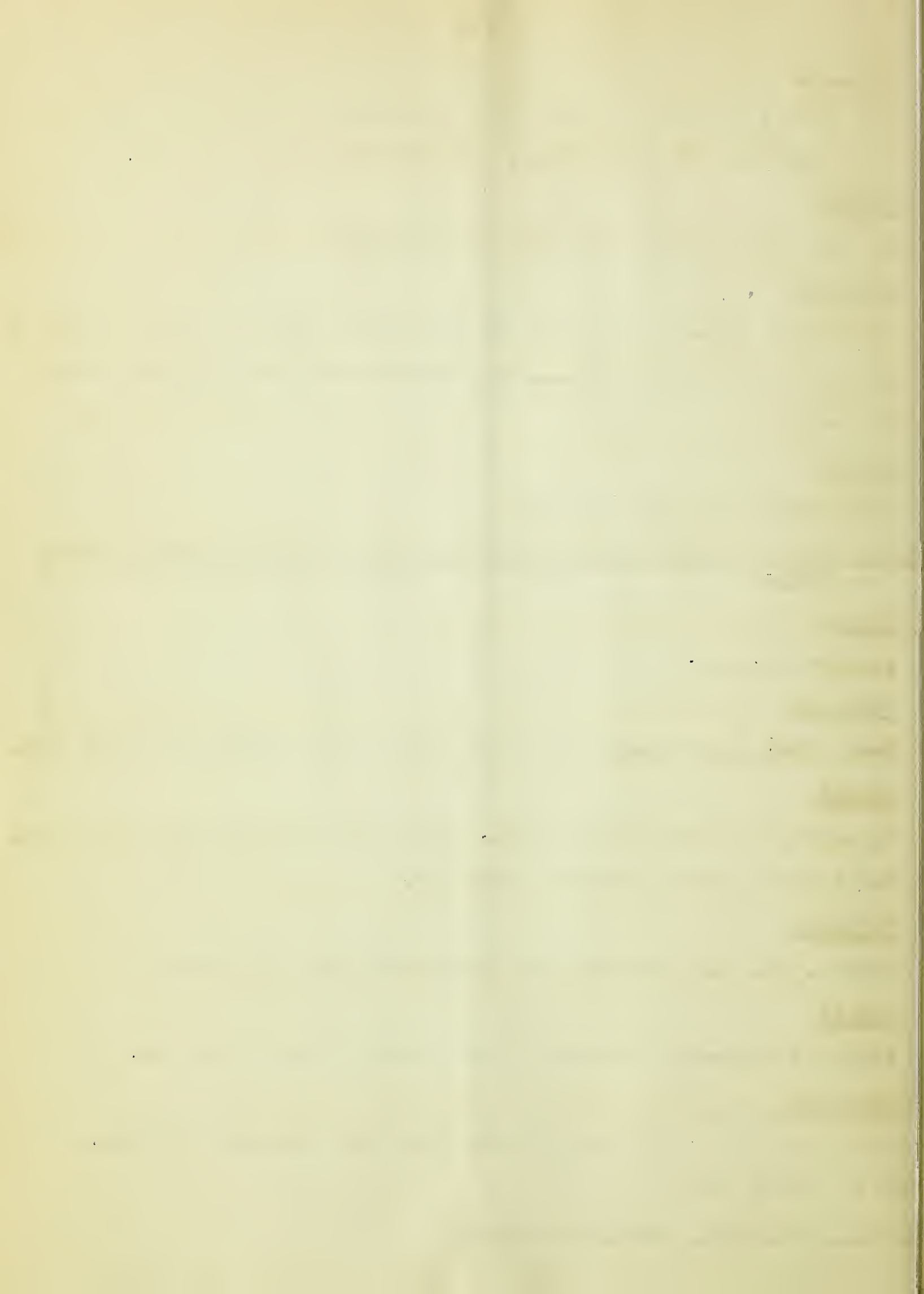
I've got that--and a couple of good strong boys to help me.

THOMPSON

Then you try it. You can terrace your farm the same as I did.

ORGAN: SCHOOL DAYS.

SOUND: Whistle of train in distance.



ARCHIE

There she comes. Old 76, right on time.

ROBERT

Yep. Reckon this is the last time we'll be walking home from school for a spell.

ARCHIE

Oh, just a few days, I reckon. But, Robert, much as I hate school sometimes, I wish we didn't have to go home to build those darn terraces. I think Dad's making a mistake.

ROBERT

Me, too. Looks like they'll take a lot of plowing and care and everything.

SOUND: Rumbling of train gets louder.

ROBERT

Dad ought to know what's right, but I think that when you're gonna farm, you ought to farm on level land.

ARCHIE

Sure. But, of course, we can't all have level land. We ought to be glad we have as much bottom land as we have.

ROBERT

Look out! Here she comes. Better get off the track.

ARCHIE

I'm watching.

SOUND: Train whistles, rumbles past.....and fades....



ANNOUNCER

The train rumbled past, and was soon gone in the distance. But Archie and Robert didn't realize that, with each wintry rain and with each summer shower, another carload of the nation's precious topsoil was going down the Obion River, down past Minglewood, down past Tigertail, down the Forked Deer and the Mississippi. But they did have the counsel of their father.

SOUND: Door opens and closes.

ARCHIE

The chores are all done, Dad.

CULTRA

Good. You and Robert pull up a chair. I want you to go over this bulletin that just came in and see what we can work out on this terracing situation.

ROBERT

Then you're going to hold a sort of lesson on terracing, huh?

SOUND: Chairs sliding up.

CULTRA (chuckling)

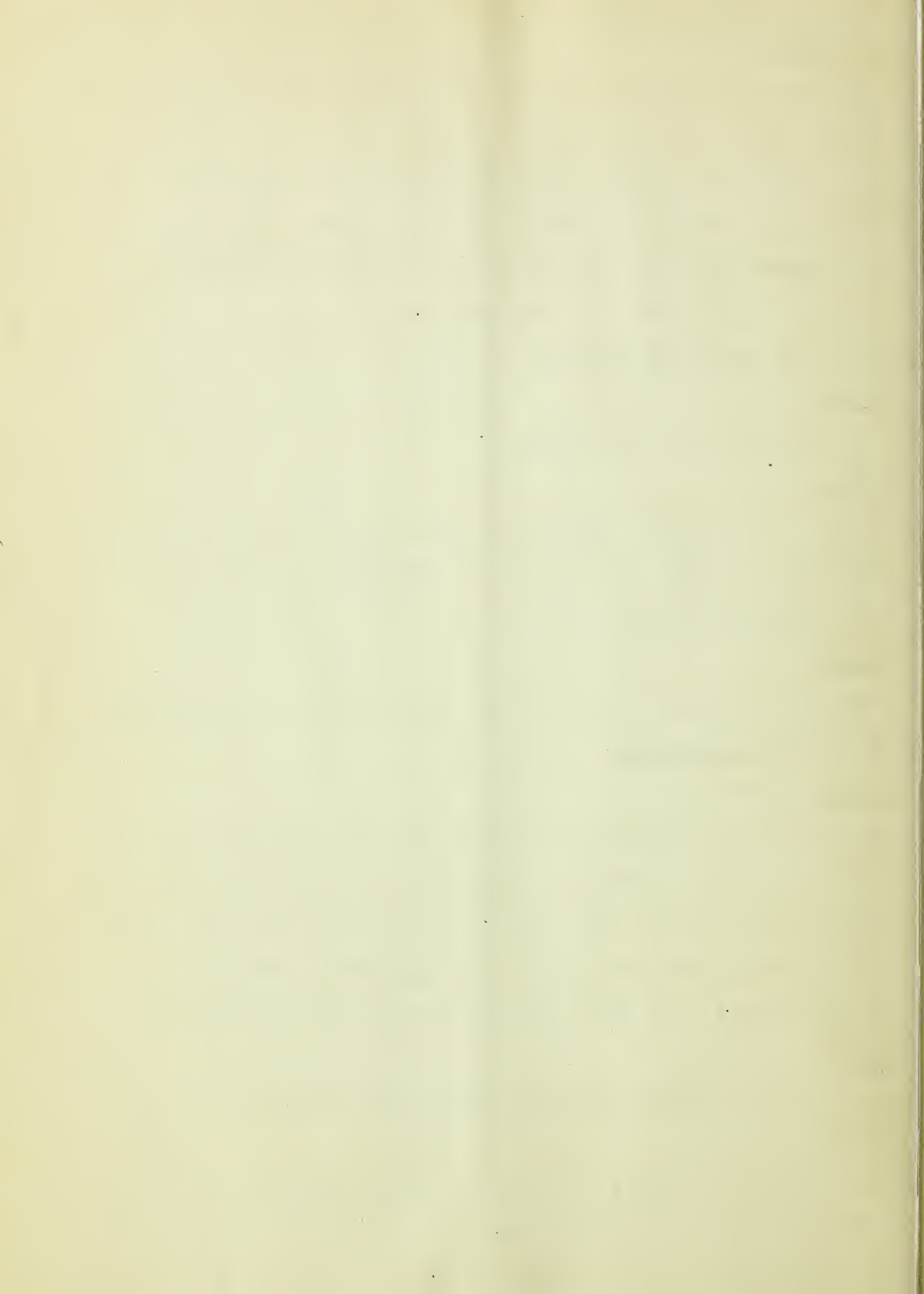
Yes, you might call it that. Now, you boys are going to have to miss a few days of school, maybe, and I'm sorry for that. But while you're helping out here on the farm, I think that you'll get a few lessons that you can't get in any school--except the school of experience. You know, experience is a dear teacher...

ARCHIE

...are you the "dear teacher," Dad? (All laugh.)

CULTRA

No, to be quite frank, in this terracing thing I'm just as much a pupil as you two boys are. And, in this school of experience, you'll probably make the best grades.



ROBERT

Well, Dad, we've been kicking about all this, but if work means anything, we'll come through all right.

CULTRA

I know you will, both of you. But now, maybe we're looking at this in the wrong way. Of course, it will be hard work. But let's look at it this way. We're fighting a battle. We're fighting an enemy-- soil erosion. If he wins, we lose our farm. But if we win, we get a rich reward--a profitable farm. And in this battle each one of us is a general. If anyone of us falls down, the enemy will take quick advantage of it, so we'll each have to do a share.

ARCHIE

My men are ready, General Cultra!

ROBERT

All present and accounted for, sir!

CULTRA

Generals Cultra and Cultra, General Cultra is ready for the march!

(All laugh.)

CULTRA

All right, let's get down to business. Tomorrow, we're going to start laying out the first terrace, but first we ought to get the theory behind all this work we're going to do.

ARCHIE

Sure.

CULTRA

Now, over here on this page...read that where I've marked it, Archie.



ARCHIE

All right. "Terracing, supported by necessary cropping practices, is primarily applicable on sloping lands that must be used for crops and on which less expensive conservation measures will not provide adequate erosion control."

ROBERT

Wait a minute. Let me see that. (Mumbles...terracing, supported by....mmmmmm.)

CULTRA

The idea is, that we can't justify terracing land that can be protected by contour tillage or crop rotations or methods like that.

ROBERT

But those methods won't stop erosion on the field we're going to terrace.

CULTRA

Right, Robert. It's all right for cropland, however, and terracing, with the other practices, seems to be the logical solution.

ARCHIE

Then you mean that terracing won't be the whole solution?

CULTRA

No, they won't. Terraces should always be supplemented with the best possible cropping practices. As I get it, if you combine terracing with rotations and contour cultivation, you'll not only save the topsoil, but the seed, the lime, and fertilizer, too.

Yes, terracing may have its objections, but think of the advantages!

ROBERT

General Cultra, we attack at dawn!

ORGAN: SCHOOL DAYS.



THOMPSON (fading in)

Well, now, Ed....are you a farmer or an engineer?

CULTRA

Good morning, George. How do you like the way we're getting started?

THOMPSON

Don't just know. Your eye will fool you, and I'm glad to see that you're laying out your terraces with a level.

CULTRA

That's what you loaned it to me for, wasn't it?

THOMPSON

Yes, yes, of course. Did the boys have much trouble in getting on to it?

CULTRA

No, it wasn't hard at all. Course, we should have asked the county agent to come out and help us, but I sorta wanted the satisfaction of doing the job myself. See, we're going to empty the terraces into that grass channel over there where Robert is standing.

THOMPSON

That's the logical place, all right. Now, let me give you a little suggestion, if I may.

CULTRA

I'd welcome it.

THOMPSON

You'll have your terraces built in a few days. But remember, building terraces is only the first part of the job. It's up to you to see that they are kept up and farmed properly. And you may find, that in spite of your best efforts, some of them won't be lined up just right.



Yes, I was counting on that. But my boys and I expect to be here for a long, long time, and we want the soil to stay with us. If we find that the terraces aren't built right, we'll work on them 'til they are right. You see, we're fighting a battle against soil washing. And on this field, with these terraces, we build the earth-works. Soil conservation is our first line of defense.

ORGAN: DOWN ON THE FARM.

ANNOUNCER

That was fifteen years ago. Today, the Cultra nursery, near Rives, Tennessee, is one of the most picturesque, one of the best preserved, of the thousands of farms in Western Tennessee. And throughout Western Tennessee, other farmers are adopting measures to defend their soil and their homes.

ORGAN: DOWN ON THE FARM.

ANNOUNCER

This story of one man's fight against soil erosion comes through the cooperation of the Dayton, Ohio, office of the Soil Conservation Service, and is presented through the Agriculture Department of the Nation's Station. And now let me call your attention to the latest bulletin on the subject of terracing issued by the United States Department of Agriculture. It's not the bulletin used by Mr. Cultra back in 1923, but an up-to-date publication entitled, "Terracing for Soil and Water Conservation." This bulletin on terracing contains 60 pages and gives complete instructions for planning the terrace system, specifications, staking, and construction, with suggestions for farming terraced land. If you would like a copy of this new bulletin, "Terracing for Soil and Water Conservation," send a letter or a penny postcard to Soil Conservation, Dayton, Ohio. I'll repeat that address, Soil Conservation, Dayton, Ohio. And here is Wally Mosier, of the Agriculture Department, who has a word for you.



MOSIER

The mythical, lovable old character with the beard and the scythe, Father Time, is slowly removing the last few sheets on the 1938 calendar. The Christmas spirit and well-wishing are in the air. From all corners of the world come wishes for a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year. In spite of all the jokes about making good resolutions just for the fun of breaking them, most of us feel that the holiday season, the beginning of a new year, is our chance to get busy and do all the things we've been planning to do. And so I suggest a resolution for conservation. Look up on the bookshelf and see what you can find in the way of reading and reference material. Nothing? Then here's how to get that material. The Soil Conservation Service has issued bulletins on many subjects. If you're interested in securing copies, take down these titles: Strip Cropping; Cover Crops; Conserving Corn-Belt Soil; Soil-Depleting, Soil-Conserving, and Soil-Building Crops; Legumes; Soil Conservation and Flood Control; and Soil Conservation Districts. If you would like a copy of one or more of these bulletins, write to Soil Conservation, Dayton, Ohio. And finally, while we're taking a look ahead, let's take a good long one--into the next generation and the one after that. If we practice soil conservation now, our children and our grandchildren may also be able to afford a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

ORGAN: I GET THE BLUES WHEN IT RAINS.

ANNOUNCER

And don't forget that copies of the bulletin on terracing may be secured by writing to Soil Conservation, Dayton, Ohio. Next week, "The Lake That Grows Corn."

SOUND: Thunder, followed by rain...



ANNOUNCER

Fortunes Washed Away is a studio presentation of the agriculture department of the Nation's Station.

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